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THE CHURCH.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE NEW CHURCH

OF THE

FIRST PARISH IN CONCORD, MASS.,

DECEMBER 29, 1841.

BY BARZILLAI FROST,

PASTOR OF THE SOCIETY.

Published by Request.

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DEDICATION DISCOURSE.

I. TIMOTHY III. 15.

THE HOUSE OF GOD, WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE
PILLAR, AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.

WE have assembled this morning, Christian brethren and friends, for a most solemn and interesting service. It is to set apart, by appropriate religious services, another house to the worship of Almighty God, to the promulgation of spiritual truth, and to the education of the human soul in righteousness, and true holiness. We may appropriately name it the house of God. So far as these purposes are fulfilled, it *will be* "The house of God, and the very gate of heaven." It delights the eye and gladdens the heart to see the noble edifice arise, for domestic comfort, for the diffusion of knowledge, for the work of legislation, and to commemorate the noble deeds and exalted virtues of departed worth. But that is a deeper want, a holier purpose, for which this building has been erected, and to which we would now dedicate it. It has been well said, "An humble spire, pointing heavenward from an obscure church, speaks of man's nature, man's dignity, man's destiny, more eloquently than all the columns and arches of Greece, and Rome, the mausoleums of Asia, and the pyramids of Egypt."* The erection of a Christian church is a new evidence of the living conviction

* Channing's Dedication Sermon at Newport, R. I. p. 4.

in a body of people of the truth of Christianity, of a settled purpose to cherish it in their hearts and in the world, and a readiness to make great sacrifices for that end. In this instance, it is not an evidence, it is true, that a new church has been gathered; that there is an accession of numbers to the universal church. But, what is not less interesting, it is an evidence, that one of the first churches that was planted in this Western wilderness, that has been watered by the tears, and hallowed by the prayers of many generations, that has been adorned by many of the noblest examples of piety and virtue, still survives; that its root is fresh, that it has now put forth, in this new building, a blossom of promise, more beautiful than any which has preceded it.

The analogy between the outward temple and the spiritual temple is so striking, and so often and beautifully described in the Bible, that the same word has been applied to both. The house, and the body of true believers who worship in it, are each called a church. In the text, the church is called the house of God. "It is the assembly, in which God lives and works — each member is a living stone — all of whom, fitly framed together, grow up into a holy temple in the Lord."* The same spiritual purpose, the same symmetry and unity of parts, the same divine spirit characterize both.

The material church is but an incident and a symbol of the spiritual church, the true communion of believers. It is this latter of which I shall speak mainly, at the present time. "The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Three topics are here suggested. 1. What is the true church? 2. What is the truth which it is to support? 3. *How* is the church the pillar and ground of this truth?

I. What is the true church? As simple as this question may appear to some of us, and as easy to answer, it has yet been found in practice to be one of the most difficult, that

* Adam Clark, on 1 Tim. iii. 15.

has ever convulsed the world. Not to speak of the different religions of heathenism, the Jew, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Independent, the Quaker, the Baptist, have each given a different answer. Each has been ready to make good his answer, by bloody wars, by stakes and dungeons; or by fierce denunciations, by middle walls of partition so thick and high, that no voice of charity and love could penetrate them. Much of this evil yet remains in the Christian world. But the wars, the stakes, the pillories are removed. Nothing now remains but a war of words, with passions much less excited, and much more charity between different communions, than ever before existed, since the little company of believers multiplied into a host. This is the dawn, as we believe, of a brighter and fairer day. Different communions are much less exclusive in the answer they give this question; they shut out fewer sects from their fellowship, and look with less unkindness upon those who are excluded. I propose to give our answer to this question, as I understand it. It embraces every humble seeker after truth, and would, if carried out, remove all causes of unkindness for opinion's sake from the hearts of Christians, and make the most opposite sects only so many different companies of the same master, working in the same spiritual vineyard according to their own modes of operation.

The word church is used in various senses in the Scriptures. Sometimes it means a mere assembly, good or bad, which is the simple meaning of the original Greek. Sometimes it means an assembly of Christians, united together, and meeting in one place, for the solemn worship of God. This is the definition given by the compilers of the "Thirty Nine Articles," "A congregation of faithful men, in which the true Word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ's Ordinances." Again, the word means the whole body of Christians on earth, who profess to believe in Christ, and acknowledge him to be the Saviour of mankind. This is the sense of the text. Accord-

ing to Dr. Bloomfield, "Almost all ancient expositors, and many modern Protestant commentators, understand this passage of the church universal, administered under an external visible form of government, — and which, by maintaining the Revelation of God and his religion, upholds it as a foundation does a building, or as pillars support an edifice."* The word church is used in a still wider sense in the Scriptures. It includes all the faithful of whatever nation from the beginning of the world, who make but one body, whereof Christ is head or chief.† In all nations, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. And all who are accepted with God belong to the universal church. There is even a wider sense in which the word is used. Paul says to the Ephesians, "For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named. All holy beings in heaven and earth are one family, make but one church. The same idea is presented in Hebrews. Contrasting the exclusive religion of the Jews with the universal religion of Christianity, the writer says, "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and a tempest; but ye are come unto the Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; — and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the First Born, that are written in heaven." In these passages all holy beings in heaven and earth are spoken of as one family, one communion, one church. The real bond of union is not outward ties. It is not belief, nor ordinances, nor church constitutions. It is the spirit of God in the soul. It is a union of all holy dispositions. "As many as have the spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

The universal church is made up of particular churches. Wherever two or three are met together in the name of Christ there he has promised to be in the midst of them. All such societies of Christians are called churches in the New Testa-

* See Dr. Bloomfield on this passage.

† Col. i. 18.

ment. The Apostles went not only from province to province, but from house to house, and little companies gathered around them, received their doctrines, and united for social worship, for mutual sympathy and edification. These Societies, whether larger or smaller, were called churches. And hence we read of the church of God which is at Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the church in such and such a person's house. These little companies of Christians had no particular set of doctrines, or mode of government prescribed to them. They at first yielded to the personal influence of the Apostles. But even they disclaimed any right to lord it over their faith, but were only helpers of their joy. All stood on a perfect independence and equality with respect to each other. All regarded themselves, and were regarded by each other and by the Apostles, as belonging to one communion. This great community is called, sometimes, "The church of God," sometimes, "The body of Christ," sometimes, "The house" or "temple of God." These words are beautifully expressive of the harmony, oneness, and sacred union of the early Christians.

But as these separate communities of Christians multiplied, and increased in numbers and worldly power, a spirit of assumption and exclusion sprang up among them. Particular churches attempted to appropriate to themselves the name and authority of the only true church. The first, most remarkable, and successful attempt was that of the church of Rome. Becoming largest and most powerful, and taking advantage of the then universal belief of mankind in the right of hereditary descent of kingly and hierarchal power, she attempted to establish her claim to be the only true church, by showing that St. Peter was her founder, to whom all power in heaven and earth had been committed by Christ; and through him had descended by a kind of hereditary right to his successors. This claim was strengthened by the fact, that the priestly office was hereditary in the Jewish religion, as well as in many heathen nations. But unfortunately for their claim, this principle has been proved by the progress of truth

to be wholly unfounded. And the Catholic must now show, not only that all power was delegated to Peter alone, which is against the express declaration of two Evangelists, that the same power was given to all the disciples ; but that Peter was expressly authorized to transfer this power to his successors, of which not a word is said in the New Testament. Nor can it be shown that Peter was ever bishop of Rome. All the earliest Christian writers, except one, say he was bishop of Antioch. Furthermore, Paul, being wholly unknown to the church at Rome, wrote to instruct them in the first principles of the Gospel. This he would not have done, if Peter had been their bishop. And in his letters from Rome, he sends the salutations of all the principal personages, but makes no mention of Peter. This he would not have done, if Peter had been bishop. But there is one argument against the claim of the Catholic to be the only true church, which of itself is conclusive. It is the corruption into which that church early fell. As if to prove to the world the pride and arrogance of this claim, God seems to have withdrawn his Holy Spirit from her, and given her over to ambition, to cruelty, avarice, and impurity.

And yet the claim of the Catholic church to be the only true church is, on the whole, the best, that has ever yet been set up. She can trace back her origin to the very days of the Apostles. She has held together eighteen hundred years. She includes in her communion about three fifths of the Christian world. She numbers in her ranks martyrs, confessors, and the brightest examples of piety and virtue, the world has ever witnessed. After this, we should have thought, that no other church would have ever set up the claim to be the only true church. But strange to say, almost every sect that has sprung up, however few, however illiterate, down even to the Shakers and Mormons of the present day, has set up this claim of being the only true church of God on earth, the only body who hold the truth, the only communion in which the spirit of Christ dwells. It is doubtless the most humiliating instance of human weakness and presumption, that is to be found in the history of our race.

But we rejoice to believe, that the view we have taken of the church is gaining ground, that it is confirmed by the Scriptures, that it results from the very nature of the truth, the soul, and God. All spiritual beings are of one family. All the good belong to one communion. There are no castes among God's children. Every true, loving soul is a member of this communion. Every one who has the spirit of Christ is a member of his body, the true church. Where two or three such souls are united, no matter how erroneous their creed, how rude their speech and manners, how borne down by ages of erroneous customs and opinions, there is a true church. And these separate churches, no matter by what mountains and continents and seas separated, nor by what continents and seas of prejudices and creeds separated, are all members of one body. So far as Christ is formed within them, and their spiritual natures are developed, they are of one heart, aim at one end, and are really working together for the establishment of the same truth. It is delightful to think, that all true Christians, while they are divided into a thousand sects, and seem even to themselves to be contending against each other, and are mixed up with hypocrites, as the wheat with the chaff, are yet really of one heart, and working to one end; that they have one faith, one Lord, one God and Father of all, who looks with equal favor upon all. O, that the walls of creeds and prejudices could be removed, and all the really good and holy could be brought near to each other! How would the scattered lights of wisdom and piety, that now burn dim and low in little sects and solitary souls, kindle into one broad conflagration, that would illuminate the world! These scattered links, if united, would form an electric chain of truth and love around the world. What assurance, what joy, what power would it not impart to each one! Before such a league the artificial combinations of wickedness would tremble and crumble. This is all that is necessary to usher in the millennium.

I have now sufficiently indicated my idea of the church of God on earth, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

II. Let us next inquire, what is the *truth* which the church is to support. I answer, summarily, it is the Gospel of Christ. I have already stated, that the text, according to the best writers, ancient and modern, refers to "the universal church, which, by maintaining the Revelation of God and his religion, upholds it as a foundation does a building, or as pillars support an edifice." Jesus said, to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth. And by his life, by his teaching, by his miracles, by his resurrection he did set forth, bear witness to, and seal that truth, on which man's recovery from sin and spiritual regeneration depend. What before were scattered hints in the volumes of sages, he brought out in the fulness and unity of fundamental truths. What before seemed the dreams of an over-refined philanthropy, he introduced into common life, as the most simple and practicable of all things. What before were but the opinions of men, he has confirmed into glorious realities. What were only vague hopes, dashed with sad misgivings, he has erected into enduring truths. And the witness which Christ bore to these truths was three-fold. It has all the force which the clearest statement can give, all the illustration which their living exhibition in the holiest life can afford, and all the confirmation that one could give, to whom God had not only given a deep insight into the spiritual world, but all power even over external nature. It is a striking illustration of the force and variety of this evidence, that it is sufficient to convince not only all sects of Christians, but even those who deny the historical truth of Christianity.

But that the Gospel contains *all* spiritual truth, we do not say. To say that infinite Wisdom cannot disclose anything more to his children, would be impious as well as absurd. John gives us to understand, that but a small part of what Jesus did and taught was recorded. And this relates of necessity to the first elements of truth. It is a book for spiritual

children, as all mankind now are. It is but a partial disclosure of infinite truths, which eternity alone can unfold. And even so far as they are stated in language, they are not properly revealed to the soul. They *can be*, only so far as the powers of the soul are expanded, its eyes opened to take in these truths. The same is true of the world. In proportion as the spiritual element is awakened, and society becomes enlightened and holy, the truths of Christianity will open in new lights. What now seems impossible, will then appear perfectly simple and practicable. We are then to expect new revelations from the written word itself, much more from nature and the soul. In proportion as our spiritual powers enlarge, our perceptions grow clearer, will the fulness and beauty of divine truth open on us. There is a great truth in the Quaker and Swedenborgian doctrine, that, in order to understand the Scriptures, we must have a portion of the same inspiration by which they were dictated. We shall understand Christ's teachings, only so far as we have his spirit, his enlargement of vision, his insight into the true nature of the kingdom of heaven. And as Christianity pervades society, and the spiritual element is awakened, and the moral vision of the world purified, Christianity will open in new and clearer lights. What in the early and dark ages it was thought to allow, it will be seen utterly to condemn. Wars, duels, slavery, aristocracy, castes in society, will all disappear before the increasing light of the Gospel, like unclean birds of night before the rising dawn. The Apostles at first thought, that the kingdom of the Messiah was a display of princely regalia and worldly splendor. When they were instructed farther into the things of the kingdom, they saw that it was the real kingdom of God, the reign of heaven on earth. As great a change will take place in the views of the world in regard to Christianity, as it is instructed into the things of the kingdom. There is much land yet to be possessed. Let us then, like the noble pastor of the Pilgrim church at Leyden,* look for new

* Robinson.

discoveries of divine truth in the written word. Let us look for the time, when the invisible things of God in the things that are made shall stand out, so as to eclipse the outward beauties of nature. Let us expect such a growth in the intellectual and spiritual man, that it shall be apparent to all that the kingdom of heaven is within us. Let us anticipate such an enlargement of vision, that we shall see, even in this world, into the deep things of God. Let us rejoice in the hope of that day, when the kingdom of our Lord shall absorb all outward kingdoms, and the reign of righteousness, the life of heaven, pure spirituality shall include all from the least to the greatest.*

III. But I must hasten to consider *how* the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. How has it, and how will it sustain and help forward spiritual truth? I answer, first, by preserving and circulating the Scriptures. The church has been the depository of the true word, through all the ages of darkness, corruption, and revolution of Christendom. Whatever the Bible has done for the world, is due entirely to the church. At first, the writings of the New Testament were written and sent to particular churches and individuals, to furnish them with a true record of the history and doctrines of Christ. These were transcribed and sent to each other, until every little assembly of two or three, on the hills of Judea, or in the cities of Asia Minor, on the plains of Syria, or in the regions of Africa, had a copy. With such accuracy were they copied, and with such fidelity preserved, that in the multitude of Manuscripts collected from the libraries of princes, universities, and monasteries, from the most different and distant parts of the world, from a thousand differing sects, although on comparison many thousand different

* This view of the discovery of new truth, from the enlargement of the spiritual powers and progress in holiness, is very different from the "emanation from God," the "inner light" "intuition," the "teachings of the spirit," as explained by the Mystics, the Swedenborgians, the Quakers, and many sects of the present time. According to these, every individual is made the subject of a special revelation.

readings have been discovered, yet the greater part of them make no material alteration in the sense. And the same is true of the Old Testament. The church of God among the Jews was to them, as the Christian church is to us, the pillar and ground of truth in this respect. Thus all have had in their hands the writings of Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles. In the Gospels, they have had a vivid delineation of Christ as he lived, taught, and died. In the Epistles, they have seen his great spiritual truths reflected from the simple hearts and the holy lives of those men of God, the apostles and pupils of Jesus. What moral power must these writings have had on the hearts of men! To this power is to be attributed the principal part of the moral change, that has taken place in the Christian world. Councils and Synods have made creeds, to be sure, and men have nominally assented to them. But the real creed of all true Christians has been the Bible. This has not only been doctrine, but spirit and life to them. It has brought them into communion with Moses and David, Jesus and John. It is the spirit of the Bible, that has produced such a moral change. It is not literature nor philosophy. Greece and Rome had almost as much of these when Christ appeared, as Christendom has now. But they were morally more corrupt, than the Scythian and Scandinavian tribes. To estimate the worth of the Bible to us, we must imagine ourselves deprived of it now, with all our knowledge and improvement. Supposing it was taken from us, and we were left to our own speculations, to the traditions of the church, to the thousand contradictory creeds of sects, to the bitter spirit of the world. Into what a limbo of theories, contradictions, and bitter contentions should we be cast? What solid foundation should we find? To whom should we go for the words of eternal life? This experiment has actually been tried by the church of Rome, and it is a most convincing proof of the worth of the Scriptures. When they were taken away from the people, into what ignorance, corruption, and spiritual death did they fall? And what was the great benefit of the Reformation? Simply in giving back to every Christian his Bible.

Again, the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, as a society for spiritual culture. The spiritual element is strong in the soul. The tender heart of childhood responds to love, pity, and goodness, and his mind believes instinctively in spiritual existences. The sentiment of reverence overflows in the hearts of all heathen nations, in the worship of every power of nature, every personified virtue. All that is wanted is culture, to make this part of our nature supreme. But in the world, all outward influences seem combined to chill the spiritual nature. The pursuits of life absorb attention and interest. The rivalries of the world alienate people from each other. The whole power of education is directed to fill the mind with a love of the world, and fit it for its attainment. The social intercourse of life is confined mostly to trivial objects and superficial sentiments. What need of a society, whose exclusive object is to awaken and cherish the deep sentiment of spiritual life in the soul; to unite the energies of different minds in developing the great truths of our spiritual nature; to kindle by sympathy the holy affections, and make all the love, the truth, the goodness of each, the possession of all? Such a society is the Christian church. How natural is it for all, who are filled with common sentiments and aim at one end, to unite? As kindred drops mingle into one, as aspiring flames unite and so rise higher towards heaven, so do kindred hearts. In every place where there are two or three holy and good souls, they will unite. The Christian church is not so much a positive institution, as the operation of one of the deepest principles of our nature. And so it was regarded by Christ. He took it for granted, that his disciples would always unite together. He gave no rules for the organization of the church particular or universal. He relied on the social principle. And this always has been and always will be sufficient. Wherever Christianity prevails, there must be a church. Those who fear the Lord, and yearn after holiness, and love Christ, will speak often one to another; and they will unite to promote these objects in their own hearts and in the world. And

what new impulses does this union awaken in each soul, and what combined power does it give to the whole ! It was in the "upper room," where the disciples met after the crucifixion of their Lord, and were of one mind, and where their hearts burned within them as they communed with each other, that they gained faith and courage, to go out into the world and proclaim the religion of their Master, in the face of all opposition. It was in cellars, caves, and secret places, where the early Christians met for worship and social communion, that they gained such apprehensions of truth and such devotion to it, that they went cheerfully to the stake, and into the presence of wild beasts. It was in the solitary retreats and mountain fastnesses, where the Covenanters had fled from the arm of persecution, for prayer and praise, that their spirits were nerved for any sacrifices for the truth. And it is in the religious assembly, where holy sentiments are deepened by sympathy with members, and the truth seems more impressive from its application to multitudes, that all Christians have received their best influences. Where two or three are met together, there is a special presence of the Divine Spirit.

"His mercy visits every house,
They pay their night and morning vows,
But makes a more delightful stay,
Where churches meet to praise and pray."

Finally, the church supports the truth by sustaining religious ordinances and institutions. It is only through the church, that the Sabbath has been established in the Christian world. And who can estimate its effect on society ? To form any conception of it, we must go into a place, where it is utterly desecrated, and then into one, where its purpose is fully realized. What moral power must there be in that day, which stops the wheels of business, hushes the noise of mirth, and, by its holy stillness and sacred associations, rebukes even the thoughtless and profane ? What efficacy must there be in an institution, that sets apart, and consecrates entirely to spiritual uses, *one seventh part* of the time, and

gathers the scattered members of society into the bosoms of quiet homes, and brings them to the house of worship.

And this suggests another support of the truth, public worship and instruction. What effect must it have on the moral character of a people, to assemble weekly, in a consecrated place, for the worship of Almighty God, to exalt their apprehensions and deepen their love of his perfections, to bring before their minds the true end of life, and the promises and sanctions of the Gospel? And when we add, that they are assisted by an order of men chosen by themselves, who give their whole lives to this single end, what a reality, what a value, what a prominence must it give to spiritual truth!

And then there is baptism, that rite by which one consecrates himself entirely to God and spiritual excellence. What effect must it have for one after another of a congregation, after deep meditation, to come forward from deliberate conviction, and receive upon their brow the symbol of that truth, which is to sanctify them, and which they are henceforth to cherish as their highest good! And what effect must it have on education, for these parents to bring their tender offspring in their arms to the same altar, and there receive on their infant brows the symbol of that purity, which makes them fit for the kingdom of heaven, and in which they solemnly engage to educate them!

The communion is another institution of the church, which is second to no other in the moral influence it has exerted on the hearts of men. It not only sets the doctrines of Christ before the eyes, but brings his personal presence into warm contact with the hearts of Christians. It brings all Christians into the same relation with their Master, in which the immediate disciples stood. It perpetuates in the minds of Christians all the scenes of Christ's life, all the tender and personal interviews with his disciples in confidential privacy, the sublime spectacle of his dying love. And who can tell how much love to Christ, how much of the feeling of brotherhood, how much holy enthusiasm for the truth, how much of the spirit of martyrdom, which has sustained Christians, and

spread the Gospel through the world, has been kindled at the communion table?

Such are the means by which the church supports and spreads the truth in the world. By the Bible, which is the record of the teachings of inspired men; by the church, which is the union of all holy and good souls for the spread of this truth; by the Sabbath, which is one seventh part of the time given up entirely to spiritual uses; by public worship and instruction, where this truth is brought before the minds of all under the most impressive influences; by baptism, which is the entire consecration of the soul to spiritual improvement; and by the communion, which brings Jesus Christ into living union with the souls of men. Such are the means of spiritual truth, which the church employs. And whatever moral elevation, spiritual light, benevolent effort, there are in the Christian world more than among heathen nations, that now are or ever have been, it is owing entirely to these institutions. If it be asked, what has the Christian church done for the world? we have only to point in silence to these monuments of its influence, and their results in holy exultation, or rather in humble thankfulness to God, under whose Providence they have been established. And if it be asked, how is the world ever to be wholly redeemed from sin and ignorance? we answer, breathe a new energy into these means, and make *full proof* of their power, and they will accomplish, what they have already so triumphantly begun.

And what is the most beautiful feature in all these means of spiritual culture, and a proof that they are from God, is, that they are entirely free and open to every one. No sacrifice of independence or of conscience is required of any one, in order to enjoy them. In the New Testament no ritual of worship is prescribed, no particular mode of spending the Sabbath, organizing a church, or administering the ordinances is specified. No summary of technical doctrines is offered, as a condition of uniting with the church. Not only is each church, however small, entirely independent, but each soul is independent. He may receive the Bible, the church, the

Sabbath, the sacraments, according to the light which God has given him. All these means are offered unconditionally to each mind, and shed their influence freely on all, as the rain, sunshine, and dews fall on the earth. The plants of holiness are left to spring up, and bloom, and bear fruit naturally, according to the soil on which they grow.

I have spoken of this independence of the church, and of the individual Christian, and of their spiritual union, as exhibited in the New Testament. It was also the grand principle of the Reformation. Luther stood up at the Diet of Worms, and before the assembled authorities of Christendom, said, "I must interpret the word of God for myself. To act against my own conscience is neither safe nor honest. Here I stand ; I cannot do otherwise ; may God help me ! Amen."* And he, and every little company of his disciples formed churches, and administered the ordinances, according to their own views, not doubting that they were members of the universal church.

This was the grand principle of the Pilgrims, who came to New England. Hubbard tells us in his History, "none of the rest of the planters (except the Plymouth colony) came over in any settled order of [church] government, only resolving, when they came hither, to carry on those affairs, as near as they could, exactly according to the word of God."† These churches were at first entirely, independent of each other. And so jealous were they of this independence, the same author tells us,‡ that when "the ministers about Boston, being now increased to a convenient number, did use to meet once a fortnight at one of their houses in course, where some question of moment was debated, some took exception at it, prognosticating that it might in time bring forth a presbytery, or superintendency to the prejudice of the church' liberties." Would that this spirit had continued, and then the power, which large sects and ministerial associations have exerted

* Life and Times of Luther. Boston : 1841. p. 115.

† Hubbard's History of New England, p. 64.

‡ p. 189.

over single churches and ministers, to awe them into exclusive doctrines and measures, would not have been witnessed.

And not only was there independence among the first churches of New England, but they allowed it to individual members. The majority did not attempt to force their opinions upon a minority, who could not conscientiously receive them. The first covenants of the early churches were very liberal. This is the testimony of those who have looked into this subject, and published Centennial and Dedication Discourses for the last twenty years. They inform us, that the first covenants of most of the churches of New England did not contain a creed. The first covenant* of this church contained no creed. It is as liberal as any Unitarian could now wish. It is delightful to see what a spirit of liberty and independence breathes in these early covenants. In the Covenant of this church, just referred to, it is written, "Whereas God hath, of his great goodness, brought us from under the yoke and burdening of men's traditions to the precious liberty of his ordinances, which we now do enjoy, we will, according to our places and callings, stand for the maintenance of this liberty to our utmost endeavors, and not return to any human ordinances, from which we are escaped."†

This independence soon led to freedom of inquiry in doctrines, as well as church discipline. Those who had left their homes and country, rather than to submit to "men's traditions" in outward ordinances, would not be likely to submit without question in the more important matter of doctrines. Accordingly, the great controversy between the orthodox and liberal portions of the church, which many think has sprung up principally in our day, began almost from the very day the Pilgrims landed. The first point discussed re-

* This covenant is given in Shattuck's History of Concord, p. 150. He has given sufficient evidence, both external and internal, to show, that this was the first or one of the very first covenants of this church. "The early Records" are lost.

† History of Concord, p. 151.

lated to human agency. Those, who held that man had something to do in the work of salvation, were called Legalists, those, who held that it depended entirely on God's electing grace, were called Antinomians. This question, in the very first settlement of the country, produced great excitement and alienation, and all classes of society joined in it. As early as 1636, Neal, in his "History of New England," informs us, that even the soldiers, who went against the Pequots, had to stop in the wilderness and settle the question, whether they were under a *Covenant of works*, or a *Covenant of grace*, before they could proceed! Nearly all who first came to New England were Calvinists. But so much progress did this controversy make, that within a century, a very large portion of ministers and people had become Arminians. Some indeed had already taken the first step when they arrived in New England. Among them was this church and its pastor and teacher, Peter Bulkeley and John Jones. This church was organized at Cambridge, July 5, 1636, and was the thirteenth established in the colony. Winthrop says in his Journal,* "the governor, and Mr. Cotton, and Mr. Wheelwright, and the two ruling elders of Boston, and the rest of that church which were of any note did none of them come to this meeting." The public reason given was some informality in the invitation. "The reason was conceived to be," says Winthrop, "because they counted them as legal preachers, and therefore would *not give approbation to their ordination*." Legalists were those opposed to extreme Calvinists. They afterwards became Arminians, and finally Unitarians.†

* Vol. I. pp. 95, 189, and 217.

† I have before me a manuscript letter written by Rev. Mr. Bulkeley to Rev. Mr. Cotton a day or two before the ordination of the former. In it he complains of a want of brotherly love among some of his brethren of the clergy. "I have found" says he, "soe much strangeness, alienation, and neglect from some, who would sometimes have visited me with diverse myles going, yet here will pass by my door, as if I were the man they did not know." He refers to a difference of opinion between himself and Mr. Cotton, and argues the point, whether sanctification, that is, a holy life, is an evidence of justification, or acceptance with God. Mr. Bulkeley argues for the affirmative,

This church then has been liberal from the very first. Such progress did liberal principles make in the society, that in the time of Rev. Daniel Bliss, the fifth minister, who was an extreme Calvinist, great dissatisfaction was manifested against these doctrines. Several Ecclesiastical councils were called, a division of the church took place, and a separate church and society existed fourteen years. A large mutual ecclesiastical council was called, in 1743, and it is remarkable, that the charges brought against Mr. Bliss, on the score of doctrine, were for preaching simple Calvinism. The following are a specimen. Complaint 10th. "Mr. Bliss said in a sermon, that it was as great a sin for a man to get an estate by honest labor, if he had not a single aim at the glory of God, as to get it by gaming at cards or dice."* This is simply the doctrine of total depravity. According to this *all* that an unregenerated man does is sin. "Complaint 6th. "Mr. Bliss hath asserted, that the main reason any man cannot enter in at the strait gate, is because he is not elected." This is a simple statement of the doctrine of Election, and Mr. Bliss so regarded it and defended it in his answer. The council voted, "The charge is fully proved." Complaint 12th. "He said, a person might go on in sins, in drunkenness, in sabbath-break-

against Mr. Cotton, who places the evidence in the "witness of the spirit." I cannot forbear to quote one sentence from Mr. Bulkeley's letter, to show his beautiful spirit. "I do assure you, it troubles my spirit, yt I cannot go along with you in these things, yet show me the light that may help me to see. I trust the Lord will open myne eye and give me a heart not to detain the truth in naughtiness." It is plain, that these causes of difference grew out of a greater freedom and liberty of opinion on the part of Mr. Bulkeley. And although he had not given up Calvinism, yet it is pretty evident he had taken the first step. Nor is the fact, that he was moderator of the Assembly of Divines in Cambridge, in 1649, and united with his brethren in opposing the heresies of Mrs. Hutchinson and other enthusiasts of the time, any evidence to the contrary.

I have been indebted for the letter, alluded to above, to the kindness of Lemuel Shattuck, Esq., of Boston, and also to his History of Concord, for many facts. This history is very trustworthy and valuable. The chapter on Ecclesiastical History is particularly valuable.

* Shattuck's History of Concord, p. 171.

ing even to rioting ; but I must tell you for your comfort, if you belong to the election of grace, Christ will bring you home." This is but a simple statement of the doctrine of final perseverance. And Mr. Bliss so regarded it, and vindicated it in his answer, substantially.* He was an honest and earnest man ; he believed these doctrines, and he did not flinch from an open exhibition and application of them. The result of the council was very singular. It condemned the *use* of the doctrines, but not the *doctrines* themselves. " We judge this a very unwarrantable use of the doctrine, and of very dangerous tendency," say they. But it is not easy to see, what other use can be made of these doctrines, if they are used at all. They ought to have condemned the *doctrines* and not the *use* of them. It is certainly a very novel spectacle, and a very hard case, for a man to be brought up before his peers, and condemned for preaching his own doctrines. Surely liberality must have made great progress in this town a century ago, when the preaching of simple Calvinism could be matter of grave charge before a large mutual council. And yet some would have us believe, that our fathers were all Orthodox, and that Unitarians have departed entirely from the faith. We are told by one who was present at the time,† that Mr. Bliss's opposers were rank Arminians. We should have known it, if we had not been told. And many, who adhered to him on account of his piety and talents, must have been so too. For as soon as he was gone, the town united in settling Mr. Emerson, who was liberal.‡ And a few years after that, the town and church were unanimous in settling Dr. Ripley, who was known to be a decided Arminian. The principal change in the views of those, who became Unitarian, was on the Trinity, which before had not been discussed. Other doctrines the liberal clergy explained then very much as Unitarians do now, as Dr. Ripley has shown in his Half-

* Shattuck's History p. 172.

† Ibid. p. 173.

‡ He was liberal for the times, or the liberal party would not have united in his settlement.

Century Sermon.* But the difference between the Arminians and Calvinists is much greater. It relates to the moral character of God, to free agency, and indeed to the whole moral system of things. Those who have gone back to Calvinism have changed much more, than those who have gone forward to Unitarianism.†

Thus the views I have presented of the church are illustrated by the formation of the first churches, as described in the New Testament, by those of the Reformation, by the Pilgrim churches, and by the whole history of our own church.

I have trespassed longer on your patience on this occasion, because I was prevented by sickness from reviewing the history of the church on leaving the old house. You will bear with me, while I add one word in regard to the outward church. Our fathers were "right New England men," of whom it has been said, "It was as impossible for them to live without an able ministry, as for a smith to work without fire." Hence we find it recorded on a fragment of the

* Page 35.

† I said in my sermon at the funeral of Dr. Ripley, p. 17, that the church covenant, when he was ordained, embraced all the doctrines of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. This needs explanation, which I intended to have supplied in a note, but in my haste forgot it. The facts are these; — There is no covenant on the church records in the ministry of Mr. Emerson. It was on a separate piece of paper. When he went into the army, he carried it with him. He never returned, and the covenant was lost. The church, while without a minister, did not feel competent to make a covenant, and so took the one in use in the time of Mr. Bliss, with some alteration. The allusion to the doctrines of the Catechism is put in a parenthesis, and is a general adoption of it, as a good summary of Christian doctrine, without binding any to the belief of any particular doctrines. It could not have been inferred from that sermon, that Dr. Ripley assented to the Calvinistic part of the Catechism; for it is stated in the preceding sentence, that he rejected the *five points* as soon as he came to years of discretion. Nor would those, who had prosecuted Mr. Bliss before a council for preaching these doctrines, assent to them. There was a compromise in the way I have suggested. The very next year after Dr. Ripley was settled, the covenant was revised and altered in this respect. Since that time it has been revised from time to time according to the progress of views. These facts I had from Dr. Ripley verbally.

proceedings of the town, in 1635, — the very year they came into this wilderness; “Ordered, that the meeting-house stand on the hill near the brook.”* It was a little east of this spot. In 1667, another house was built, standing between this, and Deacon Jarvis’s house. In 1711 and 1712, the one of which the present house is but the transformation was built. So that this, considered as remodelled, is only the third house in this town during a period of 206 years. This house has undergone as many transformations as the infant in growing to maturity. At first, it was nearly square, three stories high, two galleries, long seats, the men on one side, the women on the other, and the children in the middle. The windows were made of sheet lead, with small diamond lights inserted. In 1749, it was repaired and glazed with sash glass “sevens and nines.” In 1791, it was remodelled in the manner you lately saw it. Now the change is so complete that no vestige of the former house remains.

The ministers, who have occupied this house during its various stages, are Whiting, Bliss, Emerson, Ripley, Goodwin. Of Whiting it was said, “He was a man of singular hospitality and generosity, who never detracted from the character of any man, and was a universal lover of mankind.” Of Bliss, Whitefield said, after hearing him preach, if he had given his life to study, he could not have produced such a sermon. Of Emerson it was said, “He was a star, to which nature and religion had given peculiar lustre.” Of Ripley — but no language could deepen your impression of his apostolic gifts and graces. Of Goodwin an admiring people have inscribed on his tombstone, what was already deeply inscribed on their hearts; “Amiable in disposition, pure in heart, able and faithful in his office, he departed this life in the hope of a glorious resurrection.” The voices and characters of such men would have hallowed any place, and made it seem the gate of heaven. Dr. Ripley was settled fourteen years before the former house was repaired, and preached

* Shattuck’s History of Concord, p. 206.

through the whole period of that house, and finally took leave of it in a public address to the grandchildren of those who had erected it. He had prepared a sermon to preach in this house, and how would his voice and venerable face have added to the joy of this occasion! I have lately spoken of him. I will now only add, that the various transformations of this house are a beautiful emblem of the progress of his mind and character. The last change is still more strikingly emblematic. But a few months ago, and this beautiful structure was a shattered, weatherbeaten, and mouldering building. Suddenly it has opened like a flower into new beauty. How emblematic of his change, whose spirit has left behind a wornout body, the infirmities of age, the imperfections of earth, and has become an angel in heaven, clothed with immortal youth and beauty!

And now, my brethren and friends of this society, you have done well, that you have repaired the waste of your outward Zion, and rebuilt and adorned the temple of God. It is not meet, that we should live in houses of cedar, and bestow our treasures on our vain desires, and let the temple of our spiritual affections and hopes go to decay. We would not offer in sacrifice to God the lame, and the blind, and the diseased, even in outward things. It is fit that He, who has erected this beautiful world, and decked it with splendor, and "curtained it with morning light," as the temple of his worship, when he is "worshipped by men's hands" should have their best offering. It is fit that infinite truth, beauty, and love should be enshrined and worshipped amidst outward beauty and harmony. May the liberal sacrifices and the united efforts, which have reared this temple, be the omen of greater union and effort to build up the true temple of God in our hearts and in our church. May this house be consecrated from this hour forever entirely to holy uses. May no worldly purposes ever desecrate it. May the voice of contention never be heard in these walls. Here may the truths of the Bible be explained and urged, not in a literal or theological way, but in the liberal spirit of God's truth, and

in the liberty and love of the Gospel of Christ. Here may all hearts unite in the communion of the true church. Here may the worship of humble and devout hearts go up with acceptance to the one God and Father of all. Before this altar may each one receive on his or her brow the baptism of water, and in the spirit the baptism of the holy ghost, by which they shall be wholly consecrated to God and spiritual improvement. Around this table may every true believer meet in sweet communion, and not only commemorate Christ's outward presence on earth, but *feel* his spiritual presence in all its soothing and quickening power. As often as the Sabbath returns, may many souls turn hither, "as doves to their windows," as the thirsty to the cooling stream, and as the weary to his rest. May the spell of worldliness here be broken. May the sentiment of reverence here be awakened even in the profane. May the great purpose of life here be brought home, even to the thoughtless. May those, who are chafed by life's cares and disheartened by its disappointments, here be soothed and encouraged. May the mourner here catch a glimpse of that truth, which robs death of its sting, and the aged of that world, where he shall soon lay down his burden. And may many be made holier and happier by the services of this house, while on earth, and prepared for a purer worship in that temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The Parish were very much united in the erection of the new church. At a legal meeting, Feb. 4, 1841, they chose Messrs. John M. Cheney, Daniel Shattuck, Thomas F. Hunt, Ephraim Merriam, Joshua Brown, William Munroe, Joseph Derby, Francis A. Wheeler, and Nathan Barrett, a building committee, "with full power and authority to vary from their instructions, as they shall judge the interest of the Society shall require." They were not limited as to expense. The committee chose Richard Bond, Esq. of Boston architect, and Nathan Hosmer of Concord master-builder. No accident

occurred through the whole. The whole house, including a large vestry and two smaller rooms in the basement story, was thoroughly finished and furnished, warmed and lighted. The expense was about eight thousand three hundred dollars, one thousand of which was paid by the parish, and the rest assessed upon the pews. The pews were sold on Friday following the dedication. Every pew was sold, except those reserved for free seats. The sum given for choice of pews above the appraisal, was eleven hundred and seventy-eight dollars. The Parish voted, that this should be applied to carpeting and cushioning the pews, and hanging a curtain behind the pulpit. The organ cost one thousand and fifty dollars. So that the whole cost was about ten thousand and six hundred dollars.

There is a striking contrast between the manner of proceeding now and in 1712, when this house was first built. Although they then on the first ballot voted unanimously to build, yet five whole days were spent in town-meeting, and three different committees chosen, before they could decide upon the course to be adopted. Everything, down even to the dimensions of every stick of timber, was settled in open town meeting. So jealous were our fathers of their liberties, and so reluctant to leave anything to the discretion of a public servant. Now we have only to have a short Parish meeting and put the whole business into the hands of a committee, and the work is done. If we compare the latter house with the former, we shall see not only how much better a small committee can conduct the building of a meeting-house than the whole town, but we shall have a striking picture of the progress of the Arts. The building committee, in 1712, were Sergeant John Wheeler, Eliphalet Fox, Lieutenant Samuel Fletcher, Captain Prescott, Richard Parker, Jr., Joseph Dakin, Lieutenant William Wilson, John Heald, and John Hunt. Cost was £610 2s. 11d.

ORDER OF SERVICES
AT THE
DEDICATION OF THE NEW CHURCH,
ERECTED BY THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN CONCORD,
DECEMBER 29, 1841.

I. VOLUNTARY ON THE ORGAN.

II. ANTHEM.

Now elevate the sign of Judah, Now elevate the banner, call it forth in Zion, O desert us not, O Lord; Thou art always gracious to thy servants, Thou art our God, O Lord of hosts, so will we praise thee, O Lord of hosts. Amen.

III. INTRODUCTORY PRAYER.

BY REV. JOHN WHITE.

IV. SELECTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

BY JOSEPH FIELD, D. D.

V. HYMN.

BY CHARLES SPRAGUE, ESQ.

God of wisdom, God of might,
Father! dearest name of all,
Bow thy throne and bless our rite;
'Tis thy children on Thee call.
Glorious ONE! look down from heaven,
Warm each heart and wake each vow,
Unto Thee this House is given,
With thy presence fill it now.

Fill it now ! on every soul
 Shed the incense of thy grace,
 While our anthem echoes roll
 Round the consecrated place ;
 While thy holy page we read,
 While the prayers thou lov'st ascend
 While thy cause thy servants plead,
 Fill this House, our God, our Friend.

Fill it now — O fill it long !
 So when death shall call us home,
 Still to Thee, in many a throng,
 May our children's children come.
 Bless them, Father, long and late,
 Blot their sins, their sorrows dry ;
 Make this place to them a gate,
 Leading to thy courts on high.

There, when time shall be no more,
 When the feuds of earth are past,
 May the tribes of every shore
 Congregate in peace at last.
 Then to Thee, thou ONE all-wise,
 Shall the gathered million sing,
 Till the arches of the skies
 With their hallelujahs ring.

VI. DEDICATORY PRAYER.

BY REV. CALEB STETSON.

VII. ANTHEM — (Dedication.)

And will the great eternal God
 On earth establish his abode ?
 And will He from his radiant throne
 Avow our temples as his own ?
 These walls we to thy honor raise ;
 Long may they echo to thy praise,
 And thou, descending, fill the place
 With choicest tokens of thy grace.
 Here let the great Redeemer reign,
 With all the glories of his train ;
 Whilst power divine his word attends,
 To conquer foes and cheer his friends.

Great King of Glory, come,
 And with thy favor crown
 This temple as thy dome,
 This people as thine own.

VIII. SERMON.

BY REV. BARZILLAI FROST.

IX. HYMN.

BY REV. JOHN PIERPONT.

O bow thine ear, Eternal One !
 On thee our heart adoring calls ;
 To thee the followers of thy Son
 Have raised, and now devote these walls.

Here let thy holy days be kept ;
 And be this place to worship given,
 Like that bright spot where Jacob slept,
 The house of God, the gate of heaven.

Here may thine honor dwell ; and here,
 As incense, let thy children's prayer,
 From contrite hearts and lips sincere,
 Rise on the still and holy air.

Here be thy praise devoutly sung ;
 Here let thy truth beam forth to save,
 As when, of old, thy spirit hung
 On wings of light o'er Jordan's wave.

And when the lips, that with thy name
 Are vocal now, to dust shall turn,
 On others may devotion's flame
 Be kindled here, and purely burn.

X. CONCLUDING PRAYER.

BY REV. ISAAC ALLEN.

XI. ANTHEM.

The Lord is King and hath put on glorious apparel, and girded himself with strength. He hath made the round world so sure that it cannot be moved. Thy testimonies, O Lord, are sure, very sure. Holiness becometh thine house for ever and ever. Amen.

XII. BENEDICTION.

BY THE PASTOR.

What King of Liberty
And what the Liberty
The King of the Sea
The King of the Sea

Will be the King

At the end of the world

IX. H. H.

At the end of the world

At the end of the world

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(Dec., 1888, 20,000)

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